



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Qatar

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2002](#)

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Qatar is a monarchy with no constitution or political parties. It is governed by the ruling Al-Thani family through its head, the Amir. The current Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, took power from his father in 1995 with the support of leading branches of the Al-Thani family, and in consultation with other leading families. This transition of authority did not represent a change in the basic governing order. The Amir holds absolute power, the exercise of which is influenced by religious law, consultation with leading citizens, rule by consensus, and the right of any citizen to gain access to the Amir to appeal government decisions. The Amir generally legislates after consultation with leading citizens, an arrangement institutionalized in an appointed advisory council that assists the Amir in formulating policy. In 1999 the Amir convened a constitutional committee to draft a permanent constitution that would provide for parliamentary elections and in July the committee completed its work and submitted a draft constitution to the Amir. In 1999 citizens participated in the first ever free and fair election of a national body, the Central Municipal Council. The second elections for the Municipal Council are scheduled for April 2003. The judiciary is nominally independent. Approximately 50 percent of the judges are foreign nationals. All judges hold their positions at the Government's discretion.

The country has efficient police and security services. The civilian security force, controlled by the Interior Ministry, consists of two sections: The police and the General Administration of Public Security. A state security investigative unit (Mubahith), which reports directly to the Amiri Diwan (the office of the Amir), performs internal security investigations, gathers intelligence, and is responsible for sedition and espionage cases. There also is a civilian intelligence service (Mukhabarat), which also reports directly to the Amiri Diwan. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The population is approximately 600,000, of whom 150,000 are believed to be citizens. The State owns most basic industries and services, but the retail and construction industries are privately owned. Oil is the principal natural resource now exploited, but the country's extensive natural gas resources play an increasingly important role. Rapid development in the 1970s and 1980s created an economy in which foreign workers, mostly South Asian and Arab, represent approximately 85 percent of the workforce. The Government has aimed for a modest increase in the participation of local nationals in the workforce. Many government jobs are offered generally only to citizens and private sector businesses are encouraged to recruit citizens as well.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, its record remained poor in some areas. Citizens did not have the right to change their government peacefully. The Government severely limited the rights of assembly and association. The Government restricted freedom of religion, although it continued to take some steps to ease restrictions on the practice of non-Muslim religions. Women's rights were restricted by law and social customs. Women have the right to vote. The Government severely restricted workers' rights. At times some domestic servants were mistreated and abused. Noncitizens, who make up more than 75 percent of local residents, faced discrimination in the workplace. The country also was a destination for trafficked persons. Qatar was invited by the Community of Democracies' (CD) Convening Group to attend the November 2002 second CD Ministerial Meeting in Seoul, Republic of Korea, as an observer.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits torture, and there were no allegations of torture by security forces during the year. There were unconfirmed allegations in previous years that some of the defendants in the trial of the 1996 coup plotters (see Sections 1.d. and 1.e.) had been tortured while in police custody; however, government officials have denied the allegations. The Government administered most corporal punishment prescribed by Islamic law but did not allow amputation. Punishments were not administered publicly.

Prison conditions generally met international standards. Women were held separately from men, and juveniles were held separately from adults. Pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted prisoners. In 2000 the International Committee of the Red Cross visited prisons; no other organization has requested prison visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the police had the discretion to arrest persons based on minimal suspicion. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of arbitrary detention in security cases. The authorities generally charged suspects within 48 hours. Suspects usually are presented to the Attorney General within 24 hours of arrest. The Attorney General decided whether to hold the suspect up to a maximum of 4 days, after which time the suspect was presented before a judge, who may order the suspect released or remanded to custody to await trial. Judges may extend pretrial detention for 1 week at a time to allow the authorities to conduct investigations or order the release of the suspect through bail. Lengthy pretrial detention was not known to occur. The accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process. There were no provisions for making legal counsel available to indigents at state expense. Suspects who were detained in security cases generally were afforded access to counsel; however, they may be detained indefinitely while under investigation. During the year, there were no cases of incommunicado detention.

In 2001 the Appeals Court upheld the guilty verdicts and sentenced to death 19 of those convicted of involvement in a 1996 coup attempt, including the prime suspect Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. The final decision to carry out or commute the executions rested with the Amir. By year's end, the Amir had not made a decision, and the 19 remained in prison. The remaining 14 suspects' sentences of life imprisonment were upheld (see Section 1.e.).

The law does not address forced exile and in the past the Government has used forced exile; however, there were no reported cases of forced exile during the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the judiciary nominally is independent, most judges were foreign nationals holding residence permits granted by the civil authorities. All judges held their positions at the Government's discretion. Approximately 50 percent of the judges are citizens. The Amir appoints all judges for renewable 3-year terms.

Responsibility for the judiciary was shared among the bureaucracies of three ministries. Adlea (Civil Law) courts were subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, Shari'a (Islamic law) courts worked for the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and Prosecutors fell under the Ministry of Interior.

The Adlea courts had jurisdiction in commercial, national security, all forms of trafficking (including drugs, contraband, and persons), and criminal matters. The Shari'a courts had jurisdiction in family, inheritance, deportation, wrongful injury, and most other civil cases. The law provides for the establishment of ad hoc state security courts. Although there have been no cases before these courts since the current Amir assumed power, they were not abolished formally by law and remain an option. Defendants tried by all courts had the right to appeal. The Appeals Court is the highest in the country.

The Shari'a courts applied most principles contained in the draft Family Status Law, which covered marriage, inheritance, and juvenile matters, to cases under adjudication. Some provisions of the legislation continue to be debated. Shari'a trials usually were brief. Shari'a family law trials often were held without counsel; however, an increasing number of litigants, especially women, used lawyers to present their cases. After both parties stated their cases and examined witnesses, judges usually delivered a verdict after a short deliberation.

Criminal cases normally were tried within 2 to 3 months after suspects were detained. Suspects were entitled to bail, except in cases of violent crime. Citizens or noncitizens were allowed to provide bail. Foreigners who were charged with minor crimes were permitted to be released to a citizen sponsor, although they were prohibited from departing the country until the case was resolved. Defendants in the civil courts had the right to be represented by defense attorneys.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in family, commercial, and civil cases. Trials in both the Adlea and the Shari'a courts were public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if the case is deemed sensitive. Lawyers in the past did not play a formal role except to prepare litigants for their cases; however, an increasing number of litigants availed themselves of a lawyer to present their cases, particularly in divorce cases.

In such cases, lawyers prepared the litigants and spoke for them during the hearing. Non-Arabic speakers were provided with interpreters. Defendants were entitled to legal representation throughout the trial and pretrial process.

Foreign residents were disadvantaged in cases involving the performance of labor contracts.

Defendants appeared before a judge for a preliminary hearing within 4 days of their arrest. Judges may extend pretrial detention for 1 week at a time to allow the authorities to conduct investigations. Lengthy pretrial detention was not known to occur.

After a public trial of persons arrested for involvement in the 1996 coup attempt, in 2000 trial judges sentenced 33 defendants to life imprisonment. Nine of them were tried in absentia. Another 85 defendants were acquitted on all charges. In 2001 the Appeals Court upheld the guilty verdicts and sentenced to death 19 of the 33 convicted; the Amir had not made a decision by year's end whether to carry out or commute the death sentences (see Section 1.d.).

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. Traditional attitudes of respect for the sanctity of the home and the privacy of women provided a great deal of protection against arbitrary intrusion for citizens and residents; there was no distinction between citizens and noncitizens. A warrant must be obtained before police may search a residence or business, except in cases involving national security or emergencies. Judicial authorities issued search warrants. There were no reports of unauthorized searches of homes during the year. The police and security forces were believed to monitor the telephone calls of suspected criminals, of those considered to be security risks, and of selected foreigners.

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners and to apply for residence permits or citizenship for their spouses; such permission generally was granted.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law does not provide for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government imposed some restrictions on these rights in practice. There was no formal censorship of the media.

Citizens expressed many of their views freely and in public. Although sensitive political and religious questions were off-limits, for many citizens there was little fear of government monitoring of their speech; however, the larger noncitizen population did not enjoy the same latitude and did not express itself freely and publicly. Unlike in previous years, there were no prosecutions for the expression of views considered offensive to the Government.

While none of the five daily newspapers, three in Arabic and two in English, are state-owned, the owners or board members generally are either high-level government officials or have ties to government officials. Copies of foreign newspapers and magazines were censored for explicit sexual content. The law provides for criminal penalties and jail sentences for libel. All cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts. Journalists continued to practice self-censorship due to social and political pressures when reporting on government policies, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

Although personal criticism of government officials was rare, the performance of ministries was the subject of extensive reporting. During the year, the Minister of Health in particular faced substantial criticism in the press and from the Advisory Council for the poor performance of the public health and hospital systems. In 2001 the Ministry of Education sued one Arabic language newspaper for a critical report on public schools, but the case was dismissed when it came to trial.

The Censorship Office in the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation reviewed materials for pornography and material deemed hostile to Islam. There were no reports of political censorship of foreign print or broadcast news media or foreign programs, but the Internet was censored for these reasons. Customs officials screened imported print media, videocassettes, and similar items for pornography, but no longer blocked the personal importation of non-Islamic religious items (see Section 2.c.).

State-owned television and radio reflected government views, but the private satellite television network, Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel (JSC), provided an internationally oriented perspective that JSC and the Government both claimed to be free of government influence. Although it is privately owned, since its inception, the Government has paid some of Al-Jazeera's operating costs. Al-Jazeera's programs generally did not cover local news. Callers to a popular morning show on the state-owned radio frequently discussed topics such as government inefficiency and the lack of responsiveness by various ministries to citizens' needs, such as poor schools, failure to deliver adequate water and sewage services, and problems with the health care system.

Approximately 80,000 residents now access the Internet, which was provided through the privatized telecommunications monopoly. During the year, Internet rates for Internet Service Providers (ISP) subscribers were reduced, and prepaid and dial-up access for non-subscribers was introduced, encouraging greater access to the Internet. Internet service was censored for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which blocked Web sites containing certain key words and phrases. A user who believed that a site was censored mistakenly could submit the Web address to have the site reviewed for suitability.

There was no legal provision or tradition of academic freedom, and instructors at the University exercised self-censorship.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law does not provide for the freedom of assembly, and the Government severely limited it in practice. The Government generally did not allow political demonstrations; however, in April it permitted a peaceful demonstration during which approximately 3,000 persons protested the Israeli government's actions against Palestinians.

The law does not provide for freedom of association, and the Government severely limited it in practice. The Government did not allow political parties or membership in international professional organizations critical of the Government or of any other Arab government. Private social, sport, trade, professional, and cultural societies must be registered with the Government; registration of such groups routinely was granted. Security forces monitored the activities of such groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

There is no legal protection for freedom of religion, and the Government officially prohibited public worship by non-Muslims; however, it permitted and protected private services.

The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch. While Shi'a Muslims practiced most aspects of Islam freely, they did not organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies or perform rites such as self-flagellation.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, the administration of clerical affairs, and Islamic education. The Amir participated in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods, and personally financed the Hajj journeys of poor pilgrims.

Shi'a Muslims were well represented in the bureaucracy and business community, but there were no Shi'as employed in senior national security positions. Non-Muslims were not known to face governmental or societal discrimination or violence.

Christian church officials continued to press the Government for authorization to construct churches. The Government designated plots for the Catholic, Anglican, Coptic, and other Christian communities on land set aside for the construction of churches, but had not issued building permits by year's end. In the past, the Government has raised concerns that rapid progress may provoke criticism among more conservative critics. In November the Government established diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

Non-Muslims may not proselytize, and the Government officially prohibits public worship by non-Muslims. However, it did permit and protect private services. Converting from Islam is considered apostasy, and is technically a capital offense; however, since 1971 there have been no records of execution for such a crime.

The Government did not permit Hindus, Buddhists, or other polytheistic religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations. However, there was no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these faiths in the private practice of their religion. There were no reliable estimates of the number of non-Muslims in the country.

The Government formally prohibited the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature; however, in practice individuals generally were not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. Religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter were available readily in local shops. However, Bibles were not available in Arabic.

Islamic instruction was compulsory in public schools. While there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases.

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

d. Freedom of Movement within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice, with some notable exceptions.

There were no restrictions on internal travel, except around sensitive military and oil installations. In general, women did not require permission from male guardians to travel; however, men may prevent female relatives and children from leaving the country by providing their names to immigration officers at ports of departure. Technically women employed by the Government must obtain official permission to travel abroad when requesting leave, but the extent to which this regulation was enforced was not known. Citizens critical of the Government sometimes faced restrictions on their right to travel abroad.

All citizens have the right to return. Foreigners were subject to immigration restrictions designed to control the size of the local labor force. Foreign workers must have the permission of their sponsor employer to enter and depart the country (see Sections 6.c. and 6.d.), but their dependents may leave the country without restriction. Foreign women who are married to citizens were granted residence permits and may apply for citizenship; however, they were expected to relinquish their foreign citizenship.

The Government has not formulated a formal policy regarding refugees, asylees, or first asylum. Those attempting to enter the country illegally, including persons seeking asylum from nearby countries, were refused entry. Asylum seekers who were able to obtain local sponsorship or employment were allowed to enter and may remain as long as they are employed.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Citizens do not have the right to change their government or the political system peacefully. The political institutions combine the characteristics of a traditional Bedouin tribal state and a modern bureaucracy. Under the amended Provisional Constitution, the Amir must be chosen from and by the adult males of the Al-Thani family. The Government did not permit political parties or organized opposition groups.

The Amir exercises most executive and legislative powers, including appointment of cabinet members. In 1999 citizens elected a 29-member Central Municipal Council. For the first time, men and women aged 18 and older were permitted both to vote and to run as candidates in free and fair elections. The Council is a nonpartisan body that addressed local issues such as street repair, green space, trash collection, and public works projects. Its role is to advise the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture. The Council does not have the authority to change policy.

In 1998 the Amir announced the formation of a committee to draft a permanent constitution that would provide for parliamentary elections. The constitutional committee was inaugurated in 1999 and included 36 government officials, academics, and prominent business leaders. In addition to subcommittees on the legislature, executive, and judiciary, it included a subcommittee on human rights. In July the committee completed its work and submitted a draft constitution to the Amir.

Impediments that prevented or hindered women from participating in politics included lack of experience and role models, and the traditional society, in which women are expected to be mothers and caretakers. The highest-ranking women in official positions were the Undersecretary of Education and the Vice-President of the University. There were no women on the elected Municipal Council. The Amir's sister, Sheikha Hessa al Thani, Vice President of the Supreme Council of Family Affairs, was given the title of Minister.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The Government does not permit independent local human rights organizations to exist. However, on November 11, the Amir announced the establishment of a National Committee for Human Rights, to be composed of representatives drawn from both government ministries and civil society. The Committee was charged with investigating human rights violations and improving local human rights conditions. By year's end, members had not been named and the Committee had not yet met.

No international human rights organizations were known to have requested to investigate conditions in the country during the year. However, Amnesty International and foreign embassies were invited to send observers to sessions of the public trial of those accused in the 1996 coup attempt. Foreign observers attended the trial sessions held in 2001.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The law prohibits discrimination in the workplace; however, institutional, cultural, and legal discrimination based on gender, race, and social status existed.

Women

According to Shari'a, all forms of physical abuse are illegal. The maximum penalty for rape is death. Shari'a provides for no punishment for spousal rape. According to a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) on family issues, domestic violence against women occurred, but was not widespread. The police investigated reports of violence against women. In the past few years, the Government has demonstrated an increased willingness to make arrests in cases of domestic violence, whether against citizens or foreigners. However, offenders who are citizens usually received lighter punishments than did foreigners.

During the year, there were no publicized arrests or convictions for domestic violence.

Some employers mistreated some foreign domestic servants, especially those from South Asia and the Philippines. In most cases, the mistreatment involved nonpayment or late payment of wages, but also included rape and physical abuse (see Section 6.e.). Foreign embassies provided shelter for maids who left their employers as a result of abuse or disputes. Abused domestic servants usually did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs.

The legal system allows leniency for a man found guilty of committing a "crime of honor," a euphemism that refers to a violent assault against a woman for perceived immodesty or defiant behavior; however, such honor killings are rare and none received public attention during the year.

The activities of women were restricted closely both by law and tradition. For example, women were prohibited from applying for driver's licenses unless they had permission from a male guardian. This restriction did not apply to noncitizen women. The Government adhered to Shari'a as practiced in the country in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. However, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. In cases of divorce, Shari'a is followed; younger children remain with the mother and older children with the father. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation. However, local authorities did not allow a noncitizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings but generally are represented by a male relative; however, women may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

The legal system follows Shari'a law in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslims have the automatic right to inherit from their spouses; however non-Muslim spouses (invariably wives, since Muslim women cannot legally marry non-Muslims) do not inherit unless their spouse formally wills them a portion (up to one third of the total) of their estates. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. However, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, whatever her religion. However, the Government did not allow noncitizen parents, even if they have custody of their children, to take them out of the country without the permission of the citizen parent, which effectively discriminated against non-Muslim parents.

Professional opportunities for women increased. Many serve as senior professionals in government service, education, health, and private business. Women made up 14 percent of the overall workforce, and 26 percent of the local national workforce, including as university professors, public school teachers, and police. Women appeared to receive equal pay for equal work; however, they often did not receive equal allowances. These allowances generally covered transportation and housing costs.

Although women legally were able to travel abroad alone (see Section 2.d.), tradition and social pressures caused most to travel with male escorts. There also have been complaints that citizen husbands took their foreign spouses' passports and, without prior approval, turned them in for local citizenship documents. The husbands then informed their wives that the wives had lost their former citizenship. In other cases, foreign wives have reported being forbidden by their husbands or in-laws to visit or to contact foreign embassies.

The Government actively supported women's education. Females constituted approximately two-thirds of the student body at the University. Increasingly women received government scholarships to pursue degrees at foreign universities.

There were no independent women's rights organizations, nor has the Government permitted the establishment of such organizations. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs sought to improve the status of women and the family under both civil and Islamic law. During the year, the Council sponsored a symposium designed to increase women's participation in political affairs, including the upcoming elections.

Children

The Government demonstrated its commitment to citizens' children's rights through a well-funded, free public education system (elementary through university) and a complete medical protection program. Education was compulsory for citizens (both boys and girls) through the age of 18. Education through primary school (the equivalent of 9th grade) was compulsory and free for all noncitizen resident children. Medical coverage for noncitizen children was limited.

There was no societal pattern of abuse of children, apart from the trafficked, juvenile camel jockeys, which was a problem (see Sections 6.c., 6.d., and 6.f.).

The Supreme Council for Family Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, set up a hotline called the Friendly Line for use by children. The system allowed both citizen and noncitizen children to call in with questions and concerns ranging from school, health, and psychological problems to concerns about sexual harassment.

Persons with Disabilities

The law does not address the question of discrimination against persons with disabilities. The Government did not enact legislation or otherwise mandate provision of accessibility for persons with disabilities, who also face societal discrimination. The Government maintained a hospital and schools that provide high-quality, free services to persons, including noncitizens, with mental and physical disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Government discriminated based on nationality in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services. Noncitizens did not receive the same benefits as citizens. They were required to pay for health care, electricity, water, and education (services that were provided free of charge to citizens) and were not permitted to own property. The largest nationality groups among noncitizens were Indian, Pakistani, and Iranian nationals, and Arab nationals of other countries. In the private sector, many citizens of Iranian origin occupied some of the highest positions.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law prohibits all workers, including foreigners, from forming labor unions. The law provides for the establishment of joint consultative committees composed of representatives of the employer and workers. The right of association was limited strictly. The committees did not discuss wages but considered issues such as organization, productivity, conditions of employment, training of workers, and safety measures and their implementation.

Since 1995 the country has been suspended from the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) insurance programs because of the Government's lack of compliance with internationally recognized worker rights standards.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Workers were prohibited from engaging in collective bargaining. Wages were set unilaterally by employers without government involvement. Local courts handled disputes between workers and employers; however, foreign workers tended to avoid drawing attention to their problems with their employers for fear of being repatriated at the request of their employer.

The law provides most workers with the right to strike, but only after their particular grievance has been ruled on by the Labor Department of the Ministry of Civil Service. Employers may close a place of work or dismiss employees once the Department has heard a complaint. The Department widely was perceived to be objective, within a narrow mandate dealing with the nonpayment of wages and poor living conditions. It did not consider wage levels that were set by employers unilaterally in the absence of labor unions.

Although it was government policy to assist laborers seeking payment of late salaries due (usually through the Labor Department), small groups of laborers (10 to 20) resorted to illegal work stoppages to force payment of arrears. In 2001 1,500 employees of a local construction company went on strike to force payment of their wages. After management did not honor an initial settlement brokered by the Labor Department, employees struck again during the year, forcing immediate payment of 1 month's back wages and a new commitment to settle outstanding arrears. Also during the year, another case involved 850 employees of a construction firm in which management did not implement a settlement to pay back wages, leading to Labor Department intervention and a new commitment from management to pay wages owed.

The right to strike did not exist for government employees, domestic servants, or members of the employer's family. No worker in a public utility, health, or security service may strike if it would harm the public or lead to property damage.

Strikes remained frequent during the year. The Labor Department claimed that it resolved the vast majority of worker complaints amicably, with a very small percentage referred to the courts for judgment.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, foreign workers in some cases were employed under circumstances that constituted forced labor. Three-quarters of the workforce were foreign workers who, dependent on a single employer for residency rights, were vulnerable to abuse. For example, employers must give consent before exit permits are issued to any foreign employee seeking to leave the country. Some employers temporarily withheld this consent to force foreign employees to work for longer periods than they wished. In extreme cases, employers deported employees at the end of their contract in order to avoid paying them the lawfully mandated end-of-service bonus. Unskilled workers and domestic servants were particularly vulnerable to nonpayment or late payment of wages.

Very young boys were used as jockeys in camel races (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law provides that minors between the ages of 15 and 18 may be employed with the approval of their parents or guardians, and some children work in small, family-owned businesses. Minors may not work more than 6 hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Labor Department with the names and occupations of their minor employees. Employers also must obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to hire a minor. The Department may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs that are judged dangerous to the health, safety, or morals of minors. Child labor occurred. Very young children, usually of African or South Asian background, were employed as jockeys in camel races (see Section 6.f.).

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children and generally enforced this prohibition effectively with respect to citizen but not noncitizen children (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Although the law provides the Amir with authority to set one, there was no minimum wage,. The average wage provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. According to Planning Council statistics, the average monthly wage in 2001 was \$795 (2,902 riyals). The law prescribes a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period, although most government offices followed a 36-hours-per-week work schedule. Employees who worked more than 48 hours per week, or 36 hours per week during the Muslim month of Ramadan, were entitled to overtime pay. This law was adhered to in government offices and major private sector companies. It was not observed with respect to unskilled laborers and domestic and personal employees, all of whom, with scant exception, were foreigners. Many such workers frequently worked 7 days per week, and more than 12 hours per day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and no effective way to redress grievances.

The Government has enacted regulations regarding worker safety, but enforcement, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy and Industry, was lax. The Department of Public Safety oversaw safety training and conditions, and the state-run petroleum company had its own safety standards and procedures. The law listed partial and permanent disabilities for which compensation may be awarded, some connected with handling chemicals and petroleum products or construction injuries. The law does not specifically set rates of payment and compensation. Workers who suffered work-related sickness or injuries received free medical treatment provided by the Government. The law does not provide workers specifically the right to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions, and workers often hesitated to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions because of fear of dismissal.

Foreign workers may enter the country on a visitor's visa, but a sponsor then is needed to convert the visitor's visa to a work visa and the worker must have his sponsor's permission to depart the country. The Government has also penalized citizen employers who severely violated residence and sponsorship laws by prohibiting them from importing labor until they rectified the situation. The law provides any worker with the right to seek legal relief from onerous work conditions; however, domestic servants generally did not pursue such relief in order to avoid repatriation. Employers mistreated some foreign domestic servants. Such mistreatment generally involved the nonpayment or late payment of wages; in some cases it involved rape and physical abuse (see Section 5).

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits prostitution and trafficking in persons; however, there have been reports that both children and women were trafficked to the country.

Children aged 4 to 15, mostly of African, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi origin, were used as jockeys in camel races. Guardians and handlers, who often posed as parents, brought the children into the country and supervised their training. They lived in difficult conditions and trained on a daily basis to become riders.

The country also was a destination for trafficked women and girls. Women from East Asia, South Asia, and Africa traveled to the country to work as domestic servants, and some have reported being forced into domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. The Government provided assistance to domestics who have suffered from abuse in the form of payment of back wages and repatriation.

The Government did not investigate or prosecute traffickers actively. The Government repatriated victims of trafficking upon discovering their presence and did not provide assistance to victims. It did not support public awareness campaigns regarding the problem of trafficking of women and girls.

In 2000 a national campaign was undertaken to set the minimum age of 15 and minimum weight of 100 pounds for camel jockeys. In 2001 the Government introduced new safety measures including the use of helmets and safety belts, and opened a school and health center for the riders. During the year, however, the minimum weight only was raised from 48.4 to 50.6 pounds.